

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7901

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 7459

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, PINT, AR, UK

SUBJECT: CONGRESSMAN DRINAN'S VISIT TO ARGENTINA

REF: BUENOS AIRES 7428

1. VISIT TO LA PLATA PRISON REQUESTED BY CONGRESSMAN DRINAN FOR NOVEMBER 12 WAS REJECTED BY BUENOS AIRES PROVINCE OFFICIALS. FONMIN INFORMED US EVENING NOVEMBER 11 THAT WHILE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAD NO OBJECTION IN PRINCIPLE TO VISIT TO LA PLATA, PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES HAD NOT APPROVED VISIT. FONMIN OFFICIAL STATED THAT DECISION WAS TAKEN ON BASIS GENERAL SECURITY SITUATION IN LA PLATA, WHERE POLICE HEADQUARTERS HAS JUST BEEN BOMBED AND VARIOUS CONFRONTATIONS WITH GUERRILLAS HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN LAST FEW DAYS, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY ON BASIS OF "PSYCHOLOGICAL ATMOSPHERE" OF LA PLATA SECURITY FORCES. HE SAID WITHOUT AMBIGUITY THAT LA PLATA POLICE ARE FURIOUS OVER BOMBING AND IN NO MOOD FOR VISIT FROM HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATES FROM ABROAD. SERIOUS TROUBLE COULD RESULT FROM VISIT BY DRINAN, AND BUENOS AIRES PROVINCE AUTHORITIES WILL NOT ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIS SAFETY. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IS IN NO POSITION TO CHALLENGE EVALUATION OF LOCAL COMMANDERS, AND FONMIN SOURCE INDICATED THAT MINISTRY ALSO BELIEVES THERE COULD BE REAL
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DANGER. ANY ATTACK OR DEMONSTRATION AGAINST DRINAN (OR LORD

AVEBURY), FROM WHATEVER SOURCE, WOULD BE DISASTER FOR GOA, IN OPINION OF MINISTRY. WE HAVE CHECKED SOURCES OF OUR OWN WHO CONFIRM THAT CLIMATE IN LA PLATA IS POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS. DRINAN REACTED WITH SOME ANGER WHEN FIRST INFORMED OF DENIAL OF PERMISSION FOR VISIT, BUT AFTER CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION WITH EMBOFF HE AGREED THAT VISIT WOULD NOT BE ADVISABLE.

2. AT DRINAN'S REQUEST, WE LOCATED CARDINAL PRIMATE STA IN CORDOBA AND ASKED IF THE CARDINAL WOULD RECEIVE DRINAN THERE DURING WEEKEND. CARDINAL SAID HE COULD NOT DO SO, AS HE WILL BE "IN THE INTERIOR." WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT PLANS DRINAN HAS OTHERWISE, BUT PLAN TO OFFER WEEKEND HOSPITALITY IF HE WILL BE STAYING IN CITY.

3. AMONG VARIOUS PRIVATE ACTIVITIES DRINAN AND AVEBURY HAVE INTERVIEWED LEGAL ASSOCIATION, EDITORS, AND NUMBERS OF HUMAN RIGHTS COMPLAINANTS UNDER SPONSORSHIP OF ASSEMBLY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS. DRINAN HAS SEEN JESUITS, AND PLANS INTERVIEW WITH PAPAL NUNCIO NOVEMBER 15.

4. ON NOVEMBER 12 BRITISH CHARGE HOSTED WORKING LUNCH FOR AVEBURY, DRINAN, MS. FEENEY, ANGLICAN BISHOP CUTTS, EDITOR COX OF BUENOS AIRES HERALD, DEPUTY CHIEF OF UNHCR, U. S. EMBOFF, AND SEVERAL BRITISH EMBASSY OFFICERS. FULL AND FRANK DISCUSSION OF ALL ASPECTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEM WAS HELD. AI GROUP INDICATED THEY WILL LIMIT FINAL PRESS CONFERENCE TO READING OF PREPARED STATEMENT WHICH WILL NOT GO INTO FINDINGS, AND EXPECT TO HAVE REPORT READY TO REFER TO GOA WITHIN ABOUT TWO WEEKS. THEY SAID THAT THEY HAVE FOUND VISIT VERY USEFUL IN GAINING BETTER AND MORE OBJECTIVE UNDERSTANDING OF SITUATION. ALL PRESENT AGREED THAT MOST LOCAL PRESS AFTER FIRST COUPLE OF DAYS OF VISIT HAD MADE REMARKABLE TURNAROUND AND BEGUN TO DISCUSS VISIT AND AI ITSELF IN QUITE OBJECTIVE LIGHT.

5. FYI. BRITISH EMBASSY APPEARS TO HAVE ABANDONED ANY ATTEMPT TO MAINTAIN FICTION THAT VISITORS ARE LEGISLATORS AND NOT REPRESENTATIVES OF AI FOR OFFICIAL PURPOSES. LUNCHEON ITSELF IS MOST OBVIOUS SIGN OF THIS, BUT SUPPORT BEING GIVEN BY BRITISH TO VISIT HAS GONE WELL BEYOND WHAT WE WOULD HAVE CONSIDERED CONFIDENTIAL

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APPROPRIATE. END FYI.

6. DRINAN TOLD EMBOFF PRIVATELY THAT DURING EVENING OF NOVEMBER 11 HE WAS CALLED UPON AT HOTEL BY COLONEL FLOURET OF MININTERIOR (SEE REFTTEL PARA 8). FLOURET TOLD DRINAN THAT GOA IS STILL DEEPLY CONCERNED OVER FATE OF MISSING COLONEL PITA, WHO AS INTERVENTOR OF GENERAL LABOR CONFEDERATION (CGT) WAS KIDNAPPED BY EXTREMISTS IN MAY 1976. HE ASKED DRINAN IF

HE WOULD USE HIS "CHANNELS OF INFORMATION" TO HELP LOCATE AND SECURE RELEASE OF PITA. IN RETURN FOR THIS, FLOURET HINTED, GOA WOULD "LOOK FAVORABLY" UPON CASES OF DETAINEES WHICH DRINAN HAD RAISED WITH IT. DRINAN SAID HE FOUND SUGGESTION INCREDIBLE, AND DID HIS BEST TO ASSURE FLOURET THAT HE WAS NOT IN CONTACT WITH TERRORISTS AND SAW NO WAY IN WHICH HE COULD ASSIST IN MATTER OF COLONEL PITA. DRINAN RAISED THOUGHT THAT FLOURET MIGHT BE PERSONAL FRIEND AND ARMY COLLEAGUE OF PITA SIMPLY TRYING ANYTHING TO HELP SECURE HIS SAFE RETURN FROM TERRORIST HANDS. DRINAN IS NOT CONVINCED THAT OFFER OF "TRADE" HAD ANY OFFICIAL GOA BACKING AT ALL.
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